

COASTAL OBSERVER

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County Council lets mask mandate expire quietly

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

An emergency ordinance that required people in Georgetown County to wear face coverings in shops and restaurants expired without a bang or a whimper this week, 300 days after it was adopted by County Council.

"We just let it roll on out," Administrator Angela Christian said. "The numbers are down."

The mandate was extended last month by a 5-2 vote, but set to expire at midnight on April 27.

The county began reopening its offices to the public and all staff on April 1. Those offices are now open without a mask requirement, Christian said, although people are encouraged to wear them.

As of this week, 27,582 county residents – just over 52 percent of those eligible – had received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

"You can't believe all the emails and phone calls I've been getting," Council Member John Thomas said. Many of those

came from the Murrells Inlet area and urged him to vote to lift the mask mandate.

No one called to say they wanted the mandate extended, he said.

"I would have voted to discontinue it," Council Member Steve Goggans said. He voted against the extension last month.

He said the response from businesses, including restaurants has been "kind of mixed."

When the mandate was adopted in July, it had support from

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The county mask mandate ended at midnight Tuesday, 300 days after it was passed.

Charles Swenson/
Coastal Observer



Photos by Chris Sokoloski/Coastal Observer

EDUCATION | Be Pro Be Proud SC

Students get the feel for careers

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Waccamaw High students learned about career opportunities in fields such as welding, robotics, truck driving and construction on Wednesday and they didn't have to go any farther than the parking lot.

The school was visited by a 53-foot tractor-trailer from "Be Pro Be Proud SC," a workforce development project designed to close the skills gap in the state. The truck houses simulators that students can use to experience what it's like to operate a backhoe or forklift, drive an 18-wheeler or fix a power line.

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Emma Kinmartin, above left, helps Emma Lalei Caviedes work the heavy equipment simulator. At left, Remi Luckiewicz tries a welding simulator.

BEACHES

County backs legislation to keep free parking

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A bill in the legislature that would prohibit beachfront towns from charging for parking without permission from the state gained support from Georgetown County Council this week.

The bill, which was introduced in response to parking limits imposed in Charleston County during the pandemic, passed the Senate unanimously and is now up for debate in the House. It would require municipalities to get approval from the Department of Transportation before restricting or altering state highways. They must provide free parking, but can charge for parking if the revenue is used for beach renourishment, maintenance or law enforcement.

The town of Pawleys Island has discussed paid parking on the roadside and at beach accesses as a way to raise revenue for future beach renourishment. The idea got a mixed reception from island property owners.

"It didn't look like they were anywhere close to giving it

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PAWLEYS ISLAND

Judge dismisses suits over beach easements

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A ruling in Circuit Court last week could end the first effort by the town of Pawleys Island to condemn easements on three beachfront lots for future renourishment projects. That effort resulted in two sets of lawsuits and a finding for the property owners that led them to seek over \$100,000 in fees and costs from the town.

Town Council voted in May 2020 to condemn the easements it says are required by the Army Corps of Engineers to allow the agency to maintain and renourish 1.4 miles of beach on the island's south end. The area was included in a \$14.8 million project last year that was funded by the town and with a state grant.

To be eligible for federal funding, which officials say would be worth tens of millions of dollars,

the town needs easements from the owners of 113 lots. It has 110.

The town sought to condemn easements from Frank Beattie, Barry Stanton and Sunset Lodge LLC. The property owners filed suit, saying the easements were unnecessary and amounted to a taking without compensation. They also said the town's process was flawed. A Circuit Court judge agreed and, in January, quashed the condemnation.

But the town had tried to correct the process with a new notice of condemnation last fall. That was also challenged by the property owners. The town later abandoned the notice and sought to have the challenges dismissed. The property owners, who are represented by Stanton, argued that they wanted their day in court.

Judge Ben Culbertson last week sided with the town, saying

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HEALTH | Community RISE

Walkers plan 12-hour journey to raise awareness of mental health

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Teresa Robinette became an advocate for mental health awareness and suicide prevention after her son Jesse took his own life in 2019.

"I'll never understand. We'll never know, we'll never understand," Robinette said. "He didn't write notes, he just said 'I love you.'"

Jesse, who was 16 at the time, was the second Waccamaw High student to commit suicide that

spring. Since that time, several WHS graduates have committed suicide.

"What bothers me is that we continue to have youth that have taken their lives," Robinette said. "I don't know what's going on with our young people. It's not just us. It's not just Waccamaw. It's not just Georgetown."

Robinette will be walking along the track at Waccamaw High School on Saturday raising awareness about mental health issues at a Community RISE fundraiser.

The first RISE walk was held in 2019 at Waccamaw High.

Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

The nonprofit, which promotes awareness, education, inspiration and support of community wellness and mental health, is a ministry of St. Peter's Lutheran Church. RISE is an acronym for resilient, informed, supported, and empowered.

"It's not something that we're doing to promote us. We're

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